

February 2017

Changing Hearts, Changing Minds: A New Evangelical Politics?

Robert J. Delahunty

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/jcls>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Robert J. Delahunty (2008) "Changing Hearts, Changing Minds: A New Evangelical Politics?," *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies*: Vol. 47 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/jcls/vol47/iss2/6>

This Symposium is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Catholic Legal Studies by an authorized editor of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.

CHANGING HEARTS, CHANGING MINDS: A NEW EVANGELICAL POLITICS?

ROBERT J. DELAHUNTY[†]

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship seeks to enable American Catholics in this presidential election year to become “better able to evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and candidates’ promises and actions in light of the Gospel.”¹ In their statement, the bishops observe that “in today’s political environment, . . . Catholics may feel politically disenfranchised, sensing that no party and too few candidates fully share the Church’s comprehensive commitment to the life and dignity of every human being from conception to natural death.”² This Essay, offered from an evangelical perspective, seeks to describe why many evangelical Christians regard the current political scene much as their Catholic brothers and sisters do,³ and how they also are engaged in the attempt to guide their political judgments by the light of the Gospel.⁴

[†] Associate Professor of Law, University of St. Thomas School of Law. I would like to thank Drew Kniffin, Nelson Lund, John L. Morgan, Mark Movsesian, Michael Paulsen, Antonio Perez, Charles Reid, Susan Stabile, and Michael Teeter for their thoughtful comments.

¹ UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* ¶5 (2007) [hereinafter *Forming Consciences*], available at <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/FCStatement.pdf>.

² *Id.* at 5.

³ See, e.g., Douglas R. Kmiec, *Reaganites for Obama? Sorry, McCain, Barack Obama Is a Natural for the Catholic Vote*, SLATE, Feb. 13, 2008, http://www.slate.com/id/2184378/pageNum/all/#page_start.

⁴ There is no bright-line definition of who is an “evangelical.” The Pew Research Center, which collects statistics on religion in American life, distinguishes three traditions within American Protestant churches: evangelical, mainline, and historically black. Of the first, the Center says: “[C]hurches within the evangelical Protestant tradition share certain religious beliefs (such as the conviction that personal acceptance of Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation), practices (such as an emphasis on bringing other people to the faith) and origins (including separatist movements against established religious institutions).” PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUB. LIFE, U.S. RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE SURVEY 13 (2008). The Pew Research Center estimates that “evangelicals” comprise about 26.3 percent of the overall adult U.S. population, or around seventy-five million people. *Id.* at 62.

I.

American evangelical Christians were bowled over last year by Michael Apted's film *Amazing Grace*, which dramatized the untiring, decades-long struggle by the great nineteenth century evangelical anti-slavery activist William Wilberforce to persuade the British Parliament to ban the slave trade.⁵ In an article in *Christianity Today* entitled *What Would Wilberforce Do? The 19th-Century Abolitionists Have Much To Teach Us About Politics Today*, the editors of that publication noted that "[i]n churches across the land, Christians have been commemorating this great activist," and urged their readers to follow Wilberforce's model by engaging in Gospel-grounded political activity.⁶ Writing in the same periodical, Charles Colson, who had watched *Amazing Grace* during the "conservative rout" on election night in November 2006, likewise urged his readers to draw inspiration for political action from Wilberforce's example: "Preach the gospel while also winsomely working for justice and truth This is what John Calvin called making the invisible kingdom visible. *Amazing Grace* is a beautiful film that warns us we cannot fast from politics"⁷ What accounts for the—to some, surprising—enthusiasm of so many evangelicals for this story of a nineteenth century crusade against slavery, and what might that enthusiasm signify for the future of American politics? Are evangelical voters—in recent years a core constituency of the Republican Party—about to take a new

The distinguished evangelical historian Mark A. Noll identifies four central tendencies in evangelicalism: "biblicism," "conversionism," "activism," and "crucicentrism." MARK A. NOLL, *THE SCANDAL OF THE EVANGELICAL MIND* 8 (1994). "But," says Noll, "these evangelical impulses have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact, easily definable, well-coordinated, or clearly demarcated groups of Christians." *Id.* Evangelicalism embraces both those who have a denominational identity, including many Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Baptists, and those who have none. It extends both to those who are Biblical literalists ("fundamentalists") and to those who are not. See Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelical Surprise*, N.Y. REV. OF BOOKS, Apr. 26, 2007, at 31.

⁵ See generally WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, *AN APPEAL TO THE RELIGION, JUSTICE AND HUMANITY OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN BEHALF OF NEGRO SLAVES IN THE WEST INDIES* (1823) (setting out his anti-slavery views).

⁶ See *What Would Wilberforce Do? The 19th-Century Abolitionists Have Much To Teach Us About Politics Today*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Mar. 2007, at 28, 28.

⁷ See *The Wilberforce Strategy: Britain's Great Abolitionist Worked To Change Society's Values, Not Just Its Laws*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Feb. 2007, at 132, 132.

political direction? If so, what direction will that be, and what considerations should guide them?⁸

Not long before Apsted's film was released, Michael Gerson, a prominent evangelical and former senior adviser and speechwriter for President George W. Bush, discerned the signs of a generational change in evangelical attitudes towards political involvement. Asked in an interview to discuss the view of Christian conservatives in the Republican Party that "government is the problem," Gerson responded:

I think there are lots and lots of young people, in their 20s to 40s, who are very impatient with older models of social engagement like those used by the Religious Right. They understand the importance of the life issues and the family issues, but they know the concern for justice has to be broader and global. At least a good portion of the evangelical movement is looking for leaders who have a broader conception of social justice.⁹

This did not mean, Gerson insisted, that such younger evangelicals were prepared to discard the social issues that have been the hallmark of the "Religious Right" since at least the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. "I also don't think the answers can be found in the Religious Left. I don't think we can minimize some of the traditional issues. I don't believe it's possible to be concerned about social justice without being concerned about the weakest members of the human family."¹⁰ If there were to be a major political realignment, Gerson predicted,

⁸ Consider the remarks made by Frances FitzGerald:

[Evangelicals] as a whole ha[ve] for a decade voted Republican in much greater proportion than [mainline Protestants or Catholics]. In 2000, 68 percent of evangelicals voted for George Bush; in 2004, 78 percent of them did. . . . [In November 2006] they turned out in their usual numbers, and over 70 percent of them voted for Republican congressional candidates. White evangelicals have, in other words, become the GOP's most reliable constituency, and they normally provide about a third of the Republican votes.

FitzGerald, *supra* note 4.

⁹ See Collin Hansen, *How Then Shall We Politick? Michael Gerson, Recently Resigned Bush Speechwriter and Adviser, on How Evangelicals Should Comport Themselves in the Public Square*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Aug. 2006, at 38, 39 (interviewing Michael Gerson). Gerson's claims about both change and constancy in the attitudes of young white evangelicals have been corroborated by recent empirical study of that demographic group. See Dan Cox, *Young White Evangelicals: Less Republican, Still Conservative*, PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUB. LIFE, Sept. 28, 2007, available at <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=250>.

¹⁰ Hansen, *supra* note 9.

it would not be so much that evangelicals would join the Democratic Party as that they would become more critical of the Republican Party:

It's probably a long-term mistake for evangelicals to be too closely associated with any ideology or political party. The Christian teaching on social justice stands in judgment of every party and every movement. It has to be an authentic and independent witness. It should have an influence in both parties.¹¹

Rather than encouraging evangelicals to become Democrats, Gerson challenged the Democratic Party to become more open to evangelicalism:

I would love to see the Democratic Party return to a tradition of social justice that was found in people like William Jennings Bryan. During that period, many if not most politically engaged evangelicals were in the Democratic Party, because it was a party oriented toward justice. I don't see much of that now in the Democratic Party. Instead of an emphasis on the weak and suffering, there's so much emphasis on autonomy and choice.¹²

II.

Gerson's allusion to William Jennings Bryan should serve as a reminder of how recent the alliance between evangelicals and the Republican Party is, and how ephemeral it may yet prove to be. Bryan, a dominating political figure at the turn of the last century and perhaps the nation's most prominent evangelical at that time, ran three unsuccessful campaigns as the Democratic Party's nominee for President, served briefly as Secretary of State in Woodrow Wilson's Cabinet, and closed out his long and heroic public career by combating Darwinism and defending parental—curricular—choice in the famous Scopes Trial, where he appeared both as counsel to the prosecution and—astoundingly—as a witness.¹³ Michael Kazin's magnificent biography of Bryan, *A Godly Hero*, reveals him as the persevering and implacable enemy of imperialism, corporate power, entrenched privilege, and war.¹⁴ The "Great

¹¹ *Id.* at 40.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ See generally MICHAEL KAZIN, *A GODLY HERO: THE LIFE OF WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN* (2006).

¹⁴ See *id.* at xiii–xxi.

Commoner”—as he was known—robustly advocated a progressive income tax before the Sixteenth Amendment, federal bank regulation before the passage of the Federal Reserve Act, the prohibition of liquor—which was in fundamental respects an issue of women’s rights and family values—before the Eighteenth Amendment, and women’s suffrage before the Nineteenth Amendment.¹⁵ Bryan’s near-pacifism (he was a friend, admirer and correspondent of the Russian novelist and Christian pacifist Leo Tolstoy) led him to oppose, without effective allies either in the Wilson Administration or in his own State Department, America’s entry into the First World War, thus forcing his resignation from the Cabinet.¹⁶ Earlier in his career, he had vehemently attacked the jingoism and imperialism that resulted in the bloody American annexation of the Philippine Islands. A romantic and a populist, Bryan drew his chief political support from the small businessmen, farmers and miners of the South and West, before whom he held out the egalitarian vision of the United States as “a republic in which every citizen is a sovereign, but in which no one cares to wear a crown.”¹⁷ Especially in his first campaign for the Presidency in 1896, Bryan’s rallies often took on the passion, drama, and cathartic release of open-air revival meetings—an atmosphere unforgettably described in Vachel Lindsay’s wonderful poem, *Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan*.¹⁸ Although he personally was not the man to enact it, Bryan’s political agenda ripened in the fullness of time into the enormously successful and durable program of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal.¹⁹ By today’s lights—as by those of his own

¹⁵ See *id.* at 41, 245.

¹⁶ See *id.* at 237–38.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 103.

¹⁸ See Vachel Lindsay, *Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan*, in *FROM TOTEMS TO HIP-HOP* 301, 301–12 (Ishmael Reed ed., 2003). A short excerpt from Lindsay’s poem should convey its flavor:

I brag and chant of Bryan, Bryan, Bryan,
 Candidate for president who sketched a silver Zion,
 The one American Poet who could sing outdoors,
 He brought in tides of wonder, of unprecedented splendor,
 Wild roses from the plains, that made hearts tender,
 All the funny circus silks
 Of politics unfurled,
 Bartlett pears of romance that were honey at the cores,
 And torchlights down the street, to the end of the world.

Id. at 302.

¹⁹ See KAZIN, *supra* note 13, at 149.

time—Bryan was not a political “conservative.” Yet throughout his public career, Bryan’s political views were grounded in his deeply evangelical convictions.²⁰

Bryan’s setback at the Scopes Trial—where he was embarrassingly cross-examined by the agnostic Clarence Darrow and scornfully derided by the journalist H.L. Mencken—seems to have ushered in a prolonged period of political quietism and cultural marginalization for American evangelicals.²¹ True, political quietism has always represented an influential strain in American Protestant life and thought, arguably going back as far as Roger Williams.²² True also, that same period saw the rise and spread of institutions, networks and media outlets that characterize the contemporary evangelical movement and demonstrate its adaptability, tenacity, and ability to survive and flourish in the seemingly inhospitable circumstances of secular modernity.²³ Thus, the evangelical turn to quietism may not have stemmed entirely from the legal success of secularism, and the evangelicals’ cultural marginalization should not be overstated.

In any event, from roughly the late 1920s to roughly the mid-1960s, American evangelicals tended to stay away from politics, and indeed regarded political engagement as a distraction from their true mission. As late as 1965, the Reverend Jerry Falwell—whose Moral Majority, founded only fourteen years later, helped secure the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1980—roundly condemned clerical intervention in politics:

Believing the Bible as I do, I would find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ and begin doing anything else—including fighting communism, or

²⁰ See *id.* at xiii–xiv.

²¹ On the institutionalization of the legend of the Scopes Trial as a decisive victory of science over fundamentalism, see EDWARD J. LARSON, *SUMMER FOR THE GODS: THE SCOPES TRIAL AND AMERICA’S CONTINUING DEBATE OVER SCIENCE AND RELIGION* 225–46 (1997). Larsen argues that the decline in evangelical political activity that ensued some years after the Scopes Trial was not, in fact, due to the trial.

²² See MARK DEWOLFE HOWE, *THE GARDEN AND THE WILDERNESS: RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT IN AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY* 9 (1965); see also Robert J. Delahunty, “*Varied Carols*”: *Legislative Prayer in a Pluralist Polity*, 40 CREIGHTON L. REV. 517, 535–36 (2007) (providing a brief survey of other understandings of Roger Williams).

²³ See generally JOEL A. CARPENTER, *REVIVE US AGAIN: THE REAWAKENING OF AMERICAN FUNDAMENTALISM* (1997).

participating in civil rights reforms. . . . Preachers are not called to be politicians but to be soul winners. . . . Nowhere are we commissioned to reform the externals. The gospel does not clean up the outside but rather regenerates the inside.²⁴

Furthermore, even after the evangelicals' return to politics, they did not always march lockstep with the Republican Party. Jimmy Carter, whose evangelical faith was very public, was elected to the Presidency in 1976 as a Democrat. As recently as 1987, only thirty-four percent of white evangelicals identified themselves as Republicans, while twenty-nine percent identified themselves as Democrats.²⁵ By the 2004 presidential election, however, Republican evangelicals outnumbered Democrats by more than two to one (forty-eight percent versus twenty-three percent).²⁶

III.

If any *single* event could be considered the catalyst for American evangelicals' reentry into politics, it would surely be the Supreme Court's appalling 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*,²⁷ which along with the decisions soon to follow it effectively created a regime of abortion on demand throughout the United States.²⁸ Slower at first than Roman Catholics to react to the judicially enforced legalization of abortion, evangelicals came to make it a banner issue, tending with increasing frequency to cast their votes for Republican Presidential candidates who promised, or at

²⁴ RONALD J. SIDER, *THE SCANDAL OF EVANGELICAL POLITICS: WHY ARE CHRISTIANS MISSING THE CHANCE TO REALLY CHANGE THE WORLD?* 15 (2008).

²⁵ See THE PEW RESEARCH CTR., *BUSH'S GAINS BROAD-BASED: RELIGION AND THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE 4* (2004), <http://people-press.org/commentary/pdf/103.pdf>.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

²⁸ The reentry of American evangelicals into politics at about this time seems to have been part of a broader trend within the worldwide evangelical community. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, which sponsored a 1974 conference of some 4,000 evangelical leaders from over 150 countries in response to a call from the Reverend Billy Graham, issued the *Lausanne Covenant*, one of the most influential documents of contemporary evangelical Christianity. The document was drafted by a committee headed by John Stott, an important British evangelical pastor and scholar. It included a statement on "Christian Social Responsibility," in which the leaders "affirm[ed] that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty," and "express[ed] penitence . . . for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive." THE LAUSANNE COMM. FOR WORLD EVANGELIZATION, *THE LAUSANNE COVENANT* ¶ 5 (1974).

least hinted, that they would appoint Justices who would overturn *Roe*.²⁹ Feeding this tendency were the successes within the judicial system of efforts to promote gay rights and legalize same-sex marriage—objectives that evangelicals saw as threatening to the family and as contrary to Biblical teaching. Ironically, then, the courts, which had helped provoke the evangelicals' exodus from politics in the 1920s, spurred their return to politics from the 1970s onwards.

The marriage between the Republican Party and the evangelical movement, however, may now be falling apart—or it is at least being renegotiated. For many evangelicals, this represents a moment of anxiety, if also one of promise.³⁰

The causes of evangelical disillusionment are many and varied. Although awarding high marks to President George W. Bush for his actions on stem cell research and faith-based initiatives, evangelical voters are mindful that Bush failed to deliver on his promise of promoting a constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage,³¹ despite the salience of that promise in his 2004 reelection campaign.³² They were also badly disappointed by his decision—though later withdrawn—to nominate the little known and undistinguished Harriet Miers for the Supreme Court. Coming after the Republican appointments of Sandra Day O'Connor, Anthony Kennedy, and David Souter to the Court—Justices whose votes upheld *Roe v. Wade* in the 1992 decision *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*³³—Miers' nomination suggested either stupidity or bad faith on the President's part. After nearly three decades of

²⁹ See David D. Kirkpatrick, *The Evangelical Crackup*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 28, 2007, § 6 (Magazine), at 38.

³⁰ At a point in the Presidential primary season when it appeared that former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani would be the Republican Party's nominee, *The New York Times Magazine* published a lengthy cover story entitled *The Evangelical Crackup*. See *id.* While in hindsight, the article overestimates Giuliani's appeal to Republican voters and underestimates the strength of evangelical voters within the Party, it does accurately capture much of the political discontent that conservative evangelicals are feeling.

³¹ See Press Release, President George W. Bush, President Calls for Constitutional Amendment Protecting Marriage (Feb. 24, 2004), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/02/print/20040224-2.html>.

³² See Press Release, Nat'l Ass'n of Evangelicals, NAE Mobilizes To Support the Federal Marriage Amendment (Feb. 24, 2004), available at <http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=editor.page&pageID=32&IDcategory=1>.

³³ 505 U.S. 833, 843–46 (1992). This group of Justices was joined by two other, pre-1980 Republican appointees, Justices Blackmun and Stevens.

Republican ascendancy in the White House, many evangelical conservatives are angry and frustrated by the party's failure to deliver a Supreme Court bench that is prepared to strike down *Roe* and have come to believe that the Republican Party is gaming the abortion issue in order to hold onto their votes.

Evangelicals are also well aware that Republican presidents have invested a vast amount of their political capital in promoting the deregulatory and tax programs of their corporate constituency and pursuing the foreign policy aims of their neoconservative constituency, but have usually allowed the conservative "social agenda" to languish. Above all, perhaps many evangelicals, after having supported President Bush's invasion of Iraq in the 2004 election, are now weary and disillusioned with the war. Belated though it may be, this recognition of the limitations of "Shock and Awe" may lead in time to a truer appreciation of the relevance of Christian principles to foreign policy.³⁴

Evangelicals are also questioning their commitment to the Republican Party, not only for the Party's repeated failures to deliver on its promises, but for forward-looking reasons as well. Like millions of other Americans, they are concerned with the ever-widening gulf of inequality that separates the nation's very richest citizens from the rest;³⁵ with the degradation of the global environment; and with the relief of disease, poverty, and famine both at home and in the underdeveloped world. The Republican

³⁴ "Shock and Awe" is a military doctrine aimed at destroying the will of an adversary to resist force. See HARLAN K. ULLMAN & JAMES P. WADE, *SHOCK AND AWE: ACHIEVING RAPID DOMINANCE* 19 (1996).

³⁵ According to the Internal Revenue Service, the nation's top 400 taxpayers reported some \$85.6 billion in income on their 2005 income tax returns. Tom Herman, *There's Rich, and There's the 'Fortunate 400,'* WALL ST. J., Mar. 5, 2008, at D1. The average income in 2004 among this group was \$172.8 million. *Id.*

[T]he top 400 taxpayers have greatly increased their share of individuals' income since the mid-1990s. The group accounted for 1.15% of total income in 2005, up from 1.02% the prior year—and more than twice as large as its 0.49% share a decade earlier. . . .

Even after adjusting for inflation, the minimum amount of income required to make the top-400 list has nearly tripled since 1992.

"Those numbers are really stunning," says Michael Graetz, a professor of law at Yale Law School and a Treasury Department official under President George H. W. Bush. "One hundred million dollars is an enormous estate to be accumulated over a lifetime, and not what we think of as one year's income for anybody."

Party has typically given little heed to such issues, although President Bush's concern for Africa should not be forgotten.³⁶ The popularity of Governor—and former Baptist minister—Mike Huckabee among Republican evangelical voters may be due in part to his interest in such emerging issues.³⁷

Against this backdrop of dissatisfaction and disillusionment, one can easily envisage an evangelical vote that is increasingly “in play” between the two major political parties. One can further imagine—as the eminent historian and perceptive social analyst Walter Russell Mead has recently done—that the evangelicals' discovery that they share some common ground with the left will *augment* rather than weaken their influence. Mead writes:

[T]he evangelical movement . . . looks as if it is maturing. That means more social and political influence, not less, as the movement broadens, reaches into the elite, and develops messages with wider appeal. Yet it also means a more pluralistic and less strident movement, more apt to compromise and less likely to be held hostage by a single issue or a single party. The real story of the evangelical political movement today involves neither its death nor its triumph, but rather its slow (and ongoing) shift from insurgent to insider, with all of the moderating effects that transition implies.³⁸

IV.

The deepening influence that Mead describes poses problems as well as opportunities for evangelicals. In what follows, I shall discuss two of these problems. The first is a danger faced, not only by evangelicals, but more generally by persons of faith who are actively engaged in politics and have achieved positions of power and influence: Rather than transforming the world, they will themselves be transformed by it. The second danger,

³⁶ See Press Release, President George W. Bush, President Bush Discusses Trip to Africa at Leon H. Sullivan Foundation (Feb. 26, 2008), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/02/print/20080226.html>.

³⁷ See MIKE HUCKABEE, FROM HOPE TO HIGHER GROUND: MY VISION FOR RESTORING AMERICA'S GREATNESS (2007); see also Nat'l Ass'n of Evangelicals, *Evangelical Leaders Have Long List of Concerns*, Sept. 2007, <http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=editor.page&pageID=502&IDcategory=1> (discussing the increasing variety of issues that matter to evangelicals, including poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the environment).

³⁸ Walter Russell Mead, *Born Again*, THE ATLANTIC, Mar. 2008, available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/print/200803/evangelicals>.

however, is more peculiar to evangelicals in this country presently: Even if they succeed in winning political power and influence, they lack the comprehensive intellectual framework that is necessary to guide and inform policy choices. As a result, it is argued that they will be unable to bring about significant, lasting changes in American law and government.

The Biblical stories of Daniel and of Esther illustrate the first of these dangers—the problem of co-optation. How is a faithful Jew or Christian, holding a position of great influence or authority under an unbelieving ruler, to be a loyal servant both of God and of that worldly master? Negotiating one's way through such situations requires judgment and *finesse* in marking out boundaries at the proper places, and in discerning what can be compromised and what cannot. Thus, Daniel and the three other young Jews with him at the court of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar are given non-Jewish “enthronement names” upon entering the king's service: Daniel becomes “Belteshazzar,” an Akkadian name that appears to mean “protect the king's life.”³⁹ Further, Daniel and his companions submit to being educated in “the letters and language of the Chalde'ans”⁴⁰ even though—or so some commentators suggest—this Chaldean knowledge may have included the study of magic and omen-reading.⁴¹ Both their change of names and their course of study, though necessary for their careers in the Babylonian court, pose a risk of co-optation: “[c]hanging names signifies a change of destinies,” and may even have been a kind of Babylonian naturalization.⁴² Taking on these risks, however, seems to be permissible. But at a certain point, Daniel and his companions must draw the line: They may not, without defilement, partake “of the rich food which the king ate, [or] of the wine which he drank.”⁴³ The Bible seems to be telling us here that Daniel and his fellows could properly adapt themselves to the culture of the Babylonian court, but not completely so. Even at the risk of incurring Nebuchadnezzar's

³⁹ See ANDRÉ LACOCQUE, *THE BOOK OF DANIEL* 29 (David Pellauer trans., 1979).

⁴⁰ *Daniel* 1:4 (Revised Standard).

⁴¹ See W. SIBLEY TOWNER, *DANIEL* 23 (1984). Whatever the exact meaning of the reference to Chaldean “letters and learning,” the Bible is emphatic in condemning Babylonian wisdom. See, e.g., *Isaiah* 47:10–14.

⁴² LACOCQUE, *supra* note 39, at 29.

⁴³ *Daniel* 1:4–5, 8.

extreme displeasure, their diet had to mark them apart as Jews, the followers of a Lord Who had higher claims on them than their king.⁴⁴

The story of Daniel is rich in lessons for persons of faith who assume positions of high responsibility in the administration and governance of a secular state. It may be particularly pointed for those who serve the American state at this present moment, because throughout the Bible, Babylon “remains the symbol of man’s megalomaniacal attempt to achieve world peace and unity by world domination and exploitation.”⁴⁵ Daniel may serve even such an idolatrous state, but only with great caution.

The problem of co-optation is not, of course, unique to evangelicals in government; rather, it is one that may arise for any person of faith who holds political power. The second

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ LACOCQUE, *supra* note 39, at 26 (quoting ALAN RICHARDSON, GENESIS I–XI (1953) (internal quotation marks omitted)). Many experienced foreign policy analysts, as well as many ordinary citizens, would share the view of Harvard University’s Stanley Hoffman that America’s recent national security policy “amounts to a doctrine of global domination.” Stanley Hoffman, *The High and the Mighty: Bush’s National-Security Strategy and the New American Hubris*, THE AMERICAN PROSPECT, Jan. 13, 2003, at 28. Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, some of our most powerful political leaders have argued for a world in which the United States had built up its military capabilities to such an extent that other countries would abandon any effort ever to compete with it. See James Mann, *The True Rationale? It’s a Decade Old*, WASH. POST, Mar. 7, 2004, at B2. Whether these policies merely reflect the influence of President Bush’s neoconservative advisers or stem more fundamentally from “the logic of empire and the imperatives arising from it” is an open question. HERFRIED MÜNKLER, EMPIRES: THE LOGIC OF WORLD DOMINATION FROM ANCIENT ROME TO THE UNITED STATES 17 (Patrick Camiller trans., 2007); see also *id.* at 148–49. Thus, a perceptive analyst such as Andrew Bacevich could argue during the Clinton administration ten years ago that “[t]he implicit, if officially unacknowledged, grand strategy of the United States today is to consolidate and preserve its world supremacy, with the clear understanding that doing so may well require the further extension of American influence.” Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Irony of American Power*, FIRST THINGS, Mar. 1998, at 19, § IV. Likewise, MIT’s Barry Posen observed in 2003 that “[t]he U.S. national security elite (Democratic and Republican) . . . settle[d] on a policy of [global] hegemony in the late 1990s. The people of the United States did not play a significant role in this decision” Barry R. Posen, *Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony*, 28 INT’L SECURITY 5, 5 n.2 (2003); see also Barry R. Posen & Andrew L. Ross, *Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy*, 21 INT’L SECURITY 5 (1996) (describing various geopolitical strategies open to U.S. in mid-1990s). Indeed, Christopher Layne, another important foreign policy scholar, argues that “from the early 1940s onwards, gaining geopolitical primacy was the overriding objective of U.S. grand strategy.” Christopher Layne, *The Case Against the American Empire*, in AMERICAN EMPIRE: A DEBATE 55 (Christopher Layne & Bradley A. Thayer eds., 2007).

problem, however, is far more likely to be felt by evangelicals than by Christians of other kinds.

Beginning with the evangelical historian Mark Noll's influential 1994 work *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, some evangelical thinkers have wondered whether their church has not become too inattentive to things of the mind; too indifferent to secular learning and scholarship; too ignorant of history, economics, political theory, and philosophy—in a word, too un-intellectual or even too anti-intellectual.⁴⁶ Just as Daniel was permitted to study the Chaldeans' literature and learning, it could be argued that modern evangelicals must master the world's wisdom in order to use it to beat the world at its own game.⁴⁷

On this view, the anti-intellectualism that is said to characterize the evangelical movement can lead to practical consequences that are harmful, even unbiblical—we are called, after all, to love the Lord our God with our whole *mind*.⁴⁸ Furthermore, it is argued that this anti-intellectualism will render evangelicals ineffective in politics. Unlike Roman Catholics—the argument goes—who can draw on the tradition of the Catholic Church's political teachings—a tradition that is informed by centuries of Catholic thought on natural law⁴⁹—or even unlike mainline Protestants, evangelicals have too little, or no, political *philosophy*. Without such a theory, the argument

⁴⁶ NOLL, *supra* note 4, at 3.

⁴⁷ Or *is* that the meaning of *Daniel 1*? Daniel also refuses the royal food, and “food is one sign of civilization. Daniel and his companions see themselves offered the best of human culture in their day, an honour which they have the boldness to refuse.” LACOCQUE, *supra* note 39, at 28. Perhaps the Bible is enjoining selectivity as to how much of the world's higher culture we may absorb? Cf. *Proverbs 23:3* (“Do not desire [a ruler's] delicacies, for they are deceptive food.”).

⁴⁸ *Matthew 22:37*.

⁴⁹ See *Forming Consciences*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 9. To be sure, evangelicals should also recognize the existence of natural law: There is a scriptural basis for natural law in both the Old and New Testaments. See *Genesis 9:1–9*; *Romans 2:1–12*. See generally AARON LICHTENSTEIN, *THE SEVEN LAWS OF NOAH* (1997). But despite the fact that many of the leading reformers (Luther and Calvin included) were exponents of natural law doctrines, modern Protestantism has generally developed only very thin accounts of natural law. This may be due to the common Protestant belief that human reason has been so darkened by the Fall that it is all but incompetent to discover moral truth without the aid of revelation; or it may be that in Protestant thought, reflection on the meaning and implications of portions of Scripture, such as the Decalogue, has in effect become a kind of natural law doctrine. See J. Daryl Charles, *Protestants and Natural Law*, *FIRST THINGS*, Dec. 2006, at 33.

continues, they will either fail to achieve power that is commensurate with their voting strength, or else they will prove inept at wielding such power once they have it. In order to transform American society for the better in truly significant and lasting ways, it is concluded that evangelicals must develop a comprehensive, biblically-based political doctrine.

This position has been put forward with considerable eloquence and persuasiveness by the evangelical thinker Ronald Sider.⁵⁰ In Sider's recent book, *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics: Why Are Christians Missing the Chance to Really Change the World?*—which is a measure of Noll's influence—Sider writes:

Evangelical failure to develop a comprehensive political philosophy contrasts sharply with what other Christian traditions, especially Catholics, have done. Roman Catholics benefit from over a century of papal encyclicals that have carefully developed and articulated a Catholic approach to public life. Mainline Protestants—both through Church declarations and the work of brilliant individuals like Reinhold Niebuhr—have also developed a substantial collection of careful thought on politics. The evangelical community has simply failed to develop anything comparable.

The absence of any widely accepted, systematic evangelical reflection on politics leads to contradiction, confusion, ineffectiveness, even biblical unfaithfulness, in our political work.⁵¹

Sider correctly insists that for evangelicals, any comprehensive political philosophy must be securely rooted in Biblical principles, and makes a powerful effort to derive an evangelical political philosophy from those sources. But his project necessarily raises the question of whether a Biblically-rooted political philosophy is even *possible*. To answer that question, we must consider—as Sider does, but not wholly convincingly—the crucial differences between the Old and New Testaments. For although the Old Testament is extraordinarily rich in political wisdom, the teaching of the New Testament seems, at least by comparison, to be largely unpolitical.

Concerned as it is with the history of a particular people; with wars and conquests; with the rise and collapse of empires,

⁵⁰ SIDER, *supra* note 24.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 19 (footnotes omitted).

nations, and dynasties; with the forms of government; with the character and duties of rulership; and with the regulation of conduct by law; the Old Testament has proven to be a fecund source of political ideas.⁵² Thus, in a strikingly original analysis, the Israeli historian Fania Oz-Salzberger has shown that for both Dutch and English political theorists in the early modern period, “the ‘Hebrew Republic’ took shape as an ideal type for the modern European legal and political system” and became the “central historical model, sometimes alongside the Roman Republic, but more often above it.”⁵³ Oz-Salzberger argues that we owe the conceptualization of such fundamental aspects of the modern State as fixed international territorial boundaries, rules of social and economic justice as elements of a well-governed republic, and a decentralized federalism to the reflections of John Selden, Thomas Hobbes, Petrus Cunaeus, James Harrington, John Milton, Algernon Sydney, and John Locke on the politics of the Old Testament. Christian political theorists and constitution-makers also drew freely on Hebrew thought—as John Witte, Jr., has shown, the covenantal theology of America’s seventeenth-century Puritans, originating in the Old Testament, yielded a doctrine of the role, duties, and limits of the state, no less than of the Church.⁵⁴

By contrast, the New Testament has seemed to many of its readers to be a deeply unpolitical document—indeed, if anything, a *depoliticizing* one.⁵⁵ Hence there is more than a little

⁵² See, e.g., AARON WILDAVSKY, *THE NURSING FATHER: MOSES AS A POLITICAL LEADER* 5–7 (1984); Daniel J. Elazar, *The Book of Joshua as a Political Classic*, 1 *JEWISH POL. STUD. REV.* 129 (1989).

⁵³ Fania Oz-Salzberger, *The Jewish Roots of Western Freedom*, *AZURE*, Summer 2002, at 88, 100, 103.

⁵⁴ John Witte Jr., *The Biography and Biology of Liberty: Abraham Kuyper and the American Experiment*, in *RELIGION, PLURALISM, AND PUBLIC LIFE: ABRAHAM KUYPER’S LEGACY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY* 243, 258 (Luis E. Lugo ed., 2000).

⁵⁵ Obviously, this characterization is extremely contested. See, e.g., JOHN HOWARD YODER, *THE POLITICS OF JESUS: VICIT AGNUS NOSTER* 1 (2d ed. 1972); see also *SIDER*, *supra* note 24, at 87–88. It is important, however, to distinguish two ways in which Jesus’ life and teaching might or might not be *political*. In one sense, the question is whether the Gospels encourage Jesus’ followers to seek or accept governmental power and instruct them on the goals for which such power is to be used. In the other sense—which is what John Howard Yoder had in mind—the question is whether the Gospels envisage the creation of a community of believers who live out a social ethic together—a community whose witness and practice, moreover, have the effect of threatening or subverting the established strictures of power in the political order. The present Essay is chiefly concerned with Christian

plausibility of Niccolò Machiavelli's claim, seconded by his disciple Edward Gibbon, that Christianity, by denuding the Romans of their citizenly virtues, brought about the collapse of the Roman Empire.⁵⁶

Consider first the Gospels and the *Acts of the Apostles*. When the devil tempts Jesus at the end of His forty-day fast, he offers Him "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them."⁵⁷ Jesus, of course, rebuffs him; but if Jesus Himself abjures temporal power, then who else can presume to be a Christian ruler in His stead?⁵⁸ Likewise, when Jesus "[p]erceiv[ed] then that [a crowd that had witnessed a miracle was] about to come and take him by force to make him king, [He] withdrew again to the mountain by Himself."⁵⁹ And when questioned by Pilate, Jesus told him: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world."⁶⁰ Jesus confronts worldly power here, not with countervailing power of the same kind, but with authority that is altogether of a different order. Should we not do the same? And immediately before Jesus' ascension into heaven, His disciples show—even at that late moment—an astounding incomprehension of the nature of His life and mission by asking Him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"⁶¹

political engagement in the former sense.

⁵⁶ See generally Edward Gibbon, *THE HISTORY OF THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE* (Penguin Books 2005) (1776); Niccolò Machiavelli, *DISCOURSES ON THE FIRST TEN BOOKS OF TITUS LIVIUS* Bk. II, ch. 2 (1513), reprinted in *2 HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC WRITINGS OF MACHIAVELLI* (Christian Detmold trans., 1882). On Machiavelli's attitude towards Christianity, see the classic study, FRIEDRICH MEINECKE, *MACHIAVELLISM: THE DOCTRINE OF RAISON D'ETAT AND ITS PLACE IN MODERN HISTORY* 49 (Douglas Scott trans., Routledge & Kegan Paul 1957) (1924). See also Isaiah Berlin, *A Special Supplement: The Question of Machiavelli*, N.Y. REV. OF BOOKS, Nov. 4, 1971.

⁵⁷ *Matthew* 4:8 (Revised Standard).

⁵⁸ Referring to this and related passages, the Swiss theologian Oscar Cullman commented: "Christ regarded as expressly satanic the understanding of the Messiah which was advocated by the Zealots and which involved a confusion of the Kingdom of God with an earthly form of the State aimed at world domination." OSCAR CULLMANN, *THE STATE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT* 24 (1956).

⁵⁹ *John* 6:15.

⁶⁰ *Id.* 18:36.

⁶¹ *Acts* 1:6.

The Epistles and *Revelation* can be read to prescribe the same unpolitical or anti-political conclusions as the Gospels and *Acts*. Paul's statement in *Corinthians* that Jesus will "deliver[] the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power" has been construed to mean that the second coming of Jesus will bring destruction to *all* purely human governments and usher in the reign of Jesus on Earth until the end of time.⁶² But if Jesus will govern in the fullness of time, to what purpose are our efforts to ameliorate the human condition through political action? And if, as Paul insists, "our commonwealth is in heaven," how important is it that we be effective and conscientious citizens of an earthly polity?⁶³ Similarly, Peter tells us that in this world we are "aliens and exiles,"⁶⁴ and the author of *Hebrews* reminds us that "here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come"⁶⁵—instructions that again could be taken to imply that political engagement in the affairs of the earthly city is useless and distracting. John also tells us in *Revelation* that when Jesus returns, "[f]rom [H]is mouth [will] issue[] a sharp sword with which to smite the nations,"⁶⁶ implying perhaps, that the work of retributive justice is for the returning Lord, not for the state.

How is an evangelical political philosophy to reconcile these apparently conflicting tendencies in the thought of the Old and New Testaments? How can such a philosophy be biblically-grounded if the Bible itself seems to instill markedly different attitudes towards political engagement? One answer, of course, would be to base that political philosophy primarily on the Old Testament, and read the New Testament in light of the Old. In effect, that is what Sider seems to have done. I suggest that evangelicals would do better, however, to read the Old Testament in light of the New. More precisely, evangelical political practice should be informed, structured, and directed by those teachings in *both* testaments of the Bible which reveal the inescapable *limitations* of political action in a fallen world, and also by those that show the necessity and urgency of political action.

⁶² 1 *Corinthians* 15:24.

⁶³ *Philippians* 3:20.

⁶⁴ 1 *Peter* 2:11.

⁶⁵ *Hebrews* 13:14.

⁶⁶ *Revelation* 19:15.

The Old Testament, equally with the New, underscores the deficiencies and limitations of political action. Consider Moses, whom God will not permit to enter the promised land. "Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."⁶⁷ What is the nature of Moses' sin that, for all his faithfulness to God, he must receive this punishment? Moses' sin is often understood to be disobedience—God had commanded Moses to *speak* to a rock in the wilderness of Zin to make it yield water for the thirsting Israelites, but Moses instead *struck* the rock twice with his rod.⁶⁸ But the medieval Jewish scholar Nahmanides offered an interpretation that read the narrative in a more politically sensitive way. Moses' sin was that after receiving God's instruction to speak to the rock, he and Aaron gathered the people together and he said: "[S]hall *we* bring forth water for you out of this rock?"⁶⁹ Moses' sin, on Nahmanides' reading, was *not* to have said, "Shall *God* bring you forth water?"⁷⁰ Moses, in short, was guilty of a form of idolatry—he misled the people into thinking that their thirst would be quenched by the action of their political leader, rather than by God. So read, the narrative is a warning against the self-idolizing arrogance that is the usual, perhaps inevitable, companion of political power.

Another Old Testament example is Joseph. Like Daniel, Joseph is the devoted counselor of an unbelieving ruler. Joseph's capable and efficient administration of Egypt's affairs is well rewarded by Pharaoh, who allows Joseph to shelter the Israelites in Egypt when famine drives them out of the promised land.⁷¹ But Joseph also takes advantage of the famine, when it later reaches Egypt, to buy up the holdings of the Egyptian peasantry on Pharaoh's behalf, bartering the food he has farsightedly hoarded for the people's land and livestock.⁷² In the end, the Egyptian people in their desperation are forced to sell themselves into slavery: "So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for all the Egyptians sold their fields, because the

⁶⁷ *Numbers* 20:12.

⁶⁸ *Id.* 20:8–11.

⁶⁹ *Id.* 20:10 (emphasis added).

⁷⁰ See WILDAVSKY, *supra* note 52, at 175–76.

⁷¹ *Genesis* 47:6.

⁷² *Id.* 47:13–17.

famine was severe upon them. The land became Pharaoh's; and as for the people, he made slaves of them"⁷³ The enslaved Egyptians, however, will in their turn eventually make slaves of the Hebrews—unlike Moses, Joseph ultimately brings his people *into* slavery, not out of it.⁷⁴ Joseph's sin is characteristic of a competent bureaucrat—to lose sight of the proper ends in his skillful exploitation of the means.

The reversals caused or suffered by the prophet and lawgiver Moses, the administrator Joseph, or the king and military commander David reveal in different ways the radical limitations of political action.⁷⁵ The Old Testament does not, of course, inculcate political quietism. But like the New Testament, it continually reminds us of how little good even the most godly and gifted can achieve through mere political power, and of how much harm they are liable to do with it instead. Nothing in the Bible encourages the belief that we can and should build the heavenly kingdom in the here and now. It teaches rather that we must *try* doggedly and perseveringly to build it, fully realizing all the while that we are condemned, in the here and now, to fail. As T. S. Eliot said in his poem *Ash Wednesday*, we must learn "to care and not to care."⁷⁶

Martin Buber's great essay *Biblical Leadership* conveys the point I wish to make here far more powerfully than anything I could say. Buber writes:

The Bible knows nothing of th[e] intrinsic value of [historical] success. On the contrary, when it announces a successful deed, it is duty bound to announce in complete detail the failure involved in the success. When we consider the history of Moses, we see how much failure is mingled in the one great successful action True, Moses brought the people out of Egypt; but each stage of this leadership is a failure. Whenever he comes to deal with this people, he is defeated by them, let God ever so often interfere and punish them. And the real history of this

⁷³ *Id.* 47:20–21.

⁷⁴ See *Exodus* 1:8–11.

⁷⁵ Just as God did not allow Moses to enter the promised land, so He did not permit David to build His temple because David had "shed much blood and . . . waged great wars." *1 Chronicles* 22:8.

⁷⁶ T. S. ELIOT, *Ash Wednesday*, in *THE COMPLETE POEMS AND PLAYS* 60, 61 (1952).

leadership is not the history of the Exodus, but the history of the wandering in the desert.⁷⁷

CONCLUSION

There are signs that a new evangelical politics is in the making. Evangelicals will continue to put the protection of unborn life and the family at the center of their political agenda. But their agenda will come to include issues of peace, distributive justice, famine relief, environmental quality, and more. The evangelicals' link to the Republican Party may not be severed, but it will strain and fray. Increasingly, evangelicals will support causes that are not ordinary parts of the Republican agenda. They will find heroes and exemplars in figures like William Wilberforce and William Jennings Bryan.

The new evangelicals will remain persuaded that Christ's followers are called to political action. They will insist that Wilberforce's long struggle against the slave trade was the right thing to do—the Gospel thing to do. Because slavery was itself an institution maintained and safeguarded by the law, they will conclude that Wilberforce's activity was unavoidably *and rightly* political in nature. As Wilberforce himself argued, Christians in a democracy have political obligations of a kind that do not exist in undemocratic systems: "In a country in which the popular voice has a powerful and constitutional influence on the government and legislation, to be silent when there is a question of reforming abuses repugnant to justice and humanity, is to share their guilt."⁷⁸ Quietism is therefore not an option: "[T]he City of God and the City of Man are inescapably engaged in transactions with each other."⁷⁹ Evangelicals will become more influential in our political life—and for better or worse, more moderate.

As evangelicals reflect on the opportunities and the dangers of political engagement, they may conclude that a politics of mere causes is insufficient, and that they need to develop a comprehensive, overarching political philosophy. If so, they must root any such philosophy securely in the Bible. They may also

⁷⁷ MARTIN BUBER, *Biblical Leadership*, in *ON THE BIBLE: EIGHTEEN STUDIES* 137, 142–43 (Nahum N. Glatzer ed., 1982) (1968).

⁷⁸ WILBERFORCE, *supra* note 5, at 75.

⁷⁹ Hugh Hecló, *Religion and Public Policy: An Introduction*, 13 *J. POL'Y HIST.* 1, 8 (2001).

look to Catholic and other Christian traditions of social thought. And they should give careful and attentive study to the important modern Jewish philosophers and political theorists who orientate much of their work toward the scriptures.⁸⁰ The evangelical mind may in time cease to be a scandal, even to itself.

It is hoped that in improving their minds, the evangelicals do not lose their hearts and souls. Anti-intellectualism is by no means an essential ingredient of true Christianity, but neither is over-intellectualism. As Thomas à Kempis said long ago, it is better to feel contrition than to know how to define it.⁸¹

It is also hoped that evangelicals who achieve leadership positions in law and government bear constantly in mind the limitations of political activity, no less than its possibilities. Political or legal victory may be decades long in coming, as it was for Wilberforce's crusade against the slave trade, and as it has already been for the effort to reverse *Roe v. Wade*.⁸² When a victory finally comes, it could produce more evil than good—a Supreme Court decision overruling *Roe v. Wade*, desirable as that would be, might lead to the *entrenchment*, rather than the overthrow, of *Roe's* abortion regime.⁸³ May evangelicals in politics therefore remember Martin Buber's thought on Biblical leadership—the Bible "proclaims that the way, the real way, from the Creation to the Kingdom is trod not on the surface of success, but in the deep of failure."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ These thinkers include Martin Buber, Daniel Elazar, Leon Kass, Emmanuel Levinas, Leo Strauss, and Aaron Wildavsky.

⁸¹ Thomas à Kempis, *THE IMITATION OF CHRIST 3* (William C. Creasy ed., 1989) ("I would much rather feel profound sorrow for my sins than to be able to define the theological term for it.").

⁸² 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

⁸³ See Robert J. Delahunty, *Federalism and Polarization*, 1 ST. THOMAS J. L. & PUB. POL'Y 63 (2007).

⁸⁴ BUBER, *supra* note 77, at 150.

